

sea watch FOUNDATION



Harbour porpoise, (Photo: Mick Baines)

NATIONAL WHALE AND DOLPHIN WATCH 2007



Land-based sea watchers at last year's event

The dates for the next National Whale and Dolphin Watch week have now been set as 23 June to 1 July 2007 – a little earlier than before, but once again spanning two weekends. Please make a note of NWDW in your new 2007 diaries and look out for more information nearer the time. We are hoping to build on the success of the 2006 event with even more manned sites, more members of the public getting involved, and wider media coverage. If you are planning to set up a manned watch during the week, please let Hanna know the details as soon as possible if you haven't already done so.

Clare Dickins and Wendy Nekar

Other news:

During December, Tom Duerden, a Sea Watch Foundation volunteer, helped to set up a display in the Blue Planet Aquarium in Ellesmere Port (see photo on right). The display was up for the whole month of December and was a great success! Lots of people had a chance to browse through Sea Watch Foundation materials, watch the species information CD-Rom and learn about UK cetaceans, so thank you Tom for a great effort!



Editorial

Welcome to the last Sea Watch Foundation news sheet for 2006. Thanks to those of you that are still braving the winter weather to bring us those all important sightings – and as you'll see below, it is still worth the effort! Thank you to all those that have contributed to the news sheet in 2006 and our best wishes for a prosperous and cetacean-filled 2007.

As always, your contributions to the news sheet are very welcome, so please send them (and photos!) to me at lawsonhandley@mac.com.

Happy
seawatching,
Lori



SIGHTINGS HIGHLIGHTS

October and November 2006

By Hanna Nuuttila

It has been a relatively quiet few months in most regions, with the exception of Moray Firth, South Grampian, Devon, Cornwall and West Wales, where numbers of bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoise remained high. During October, bottlenose dolphins were seen almost daily off New Quay and Aberdeen. In the Inner Hebrides and North West Scotland, humpback whales were seen in Loch Long, the Sound of Rona and Gairloch. A rare group of nine sperm whales were spotted off Lossiemouth in November, but sadly this was followed soon after by one sperm whale found stranded in the same region. A northern bottlenose whale was also found stranded in Craigton in the Moray Firth in October. In South-Eastern England, harbour porpoise have been seen regularly in the River Blackwater in Essex, and in Dorset there were a few unexpected bottlenose dolphin sightings in October. In North Devon, harbour porpoise have been sighted regularly, and in South Devon there have been plenty of sightings too including an unidentified large whale spotted off Plymouth and Berry Head in mid October. Cornwall has been equally busy with harbour porpoise, bottlenose dolphin and common dolphin sightings, and a lone pilot whale was spotted off Looe in early November. Minke whales were sighted frequently around the Isle of Man in early October and again in November, but the Channel Islands have been unusually quiet in the sightings front in the last few months.

As always, please send your sightings to the Sea Watch Foundation Sightings Officer, at: sightings@seawatchfoundation.org.uk. You can also report sightings by telephone on 01545 561227 or submit directly using our website sightings form. However this doesn't record your effort time, so please do still send us your effort forms by email or by post to Paragon House, Wellington Place, New Quay, SA45 9NR. All the forms are available on our website, but if you have problems with downloading or printing these, I will be happy to send you some hard copies. Also if you are interested in collating sightings from your region, and contributing articles or pictures to the newsletter please do let us know!

REGIONAL ROUNDUP

Shetland

No sightings were reported by the Shetland Sea Mammal Group during this period. If you have any sightings, please send them to us!

Orkney and North Scotland

Large groups of up to 20 harbour porpoise were reported off John O'Groats in October, but there have been no reported sightings off the north coast during the winter months.

North East Scotland: Caithness, Moray Firth and North Grampian Compiled by Hanna Nuuttila

In October, the sightings rate dropped, but sightings of mainly harbour porpoise were still received from Lybster, Whaligoe, Strath Steven and Burghead. During October and November, bottlenose dolphins were seen a few times in the Inner Moray Firth and North Grampian coasts and once off Nigg further north. One record of either white-beaked or white-sided dolphins was reported during this period.



Sperm whales recorded by
RAF Lossiemouth D-FLT 202
Squadron.

A solitary minke whale was spotted off Burghead a few times in October. A northern bottlenose whale was found dead on the Black Isle in mid October. The highlight of the season, however, was a group of nine sperm whales spotted from the RAF search and rescue helicopter just three miles off the mouth of River Spey in mid November. Sadly one sperm whale was reported stranded in early December in Burghead, and may have been from this group. A dead northern bottlenose whale was found near Black Isle in mid October. Towards the end of the month, the sightings were mainly of harbour porpoise, seen from Lybster.



Stranded sperm whale with jaw
missing on the beach at
Burghead by Peter MacDonald.

Howard Hartley Loates noted that the Inner Moray Firth was relatively quiet during October and November, with sporadic sightings of individual and small groups of both bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoise. Howard also mentioned that he received the following comments from Bob Reid of the Wildlife Unit of the Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) Veterinary Services about the northern bottlenose whale that stranded at North Kessock.

Bob stated that "on histological examination of the brain from the Northern bottlenose whale, there were interesting lesions probably associated with a fungal infection. These are undergoing further investigation."

South Grampian

From Kevin Hepworth, regional coordinator for South Grampian

October was marked by the loss of our summer visitors, with a return to the more usual (but abundant) sightings of bottlenose dolphin and harbour porpoise. There was a dramatic reappearance of bottlenose dolphins off Aberdeen, with daily sightings at the beginning of the month. We received a total of 47 reports: 14 sightings of harbour porpoise and 33 sightings of bottlenose dolphins. I ran a Sea Watch survey from Stonehaven, despite a heavy swell and a successful (bottlenose dolphins) EGCP land-based watch at Girdleness with several participants.

The return to our two 'usual suspects' marked the end of an extremely odd summer and the glorious weather allowed for some good sustained observations of harbour porpoises. These sightings were split between Girdleness on the 8th October (two sightings of two animals) and the 28th October (four sightings of one or two animals) and Stonehaven with notable reports of five animals on the 9th October, five on the 20th October, three on the 23rd October, and four on the 24th October. The remaining 32 reported were all of bottlenose dolphin, with Aberdeen and its environs having the lion's share with 18 of the sightings.

The remainder of the sightings were largely from Stonehaven with 10 and then Arbroath and Muchalls each having two and Montrose one sighting. Groups of 15-28 were seen around Aberdeen harbour on a daily basis at the beginning of the month (although rough seas in the third week of October precluded much watching). For the remainder of the month, group sizes of 6-15 were more typical. Unusually, there were also singles off the coastline on the 6th, 10th and 14th October. The group of 28 bottlenose dolphins were seen feeding at Aberdeen harbour entrance for almost nine hours on the 8th October. This group comprised several calves, including one with a large lump behind the dorsal fin, which was also encountered during a boat survey in April. Another notable dolphin on this particular date was "Runny Paint", a well marked individual that is in our photo-ID catalogue. Other notable sightings were 15 on the 6th October (Girdleness), 15 at Torry Battery on the 15th October, and 10 at Stonehaven on the 20th October.



Heavily lesioned bottlenose dolphin seen on 3rd November's boat survey (Photo: K. Hepworth)



Juvenile bottlenose dolphin exhibiting skeletal distortion, Newtonhill. (Photo: Caroline Weir)

With the exception of the first week, November was a very windy and stormy month. Combined with the usual short days, this resulted in a dramatic drop in sightings, but as usual, the almost guaranteed occurrence of bottlenose dolphins around Aberdeen harbour did mean that when a land based survey was run, observers were rewarded with a fine display of leaping/splashing and feeding. The October pattern continued, with two successful boat trips possible at the start of the month in warm conditions (last year, by this time we'd had our first dusting of snow!) and fairly calm seas. The surveys were run after a windy spell in October and thus encountered some fantastic birds, including several little auks. Other birds of note were skeins of barnacle geese, a Slavonian grebe, bramblings coming in off the sea, some very late puffins, black guillemot, and red throated divers. On the cetacean front, both trips (3rd and 4th November) encountered bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoise on a couple of occasions. One of the encounters was with the

group of 10-12 that includes a calf with skeletal distortion (see photo above) and also a very blotchy animal with many skin lesions. It is primarily this group that has been observed from the land both at Aberdeen and Stonehaven. Other notable sightings were 12 off Newtonhill on the 11th November, and 14 in Stonehaven bay on the 20th November.

Harbour porpoise reports were of single animals except for two from the boat survey on the 4th November off Portlethen. We logged a total of 30 reports: five of harbour porpoise and 25 of bottlenose dolphin.

In other news, we lodged applications for funding for vessel-based surveys for 2007, resurrected our bottlenose dolphin ID catalogue, submitted an application for a sightings postcard scheme to the East Grampian Coastal Partnership, and finally, were requested to provide species ID and description notice boards at Cruden Bay by Port Erroll Harbour Authority.

South East Scotland

No sightings reported from Angus, the Firth of Forth or Scottish Borders – if you have any sightings please let us know!

North West Scotland

There were a few sightings from Stoer Head, of harbour porpoise and white-beaked dolphin in October, as well as a minke whale seen on the 15th October, and unidentified dolphins from Rua Reidh light house on the 16th.

West and South West Scotland (Hebrides)

From Laura Mandleberg, Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust Sightings Officer

The usual drop in sightings has continued to prevail as we head into the dark winter months. November was particularly stormy with low after low rolling in from the Atlantic bringing lots of rain and wind to the coastal communities of western Scotland. However, before the weather deteriorated we were graced with a spectacular sighting to finish off what was quite a disappointing season in terms of sightings. A humpback whale was present in Loch Long for a week or so in mid-October, much to the delight of local residents. Loch Long is a very long (hence the name!), narrow sea loch just north of the Clyde estuary and is a fairly unusual location for whale sightings. Because of its presence in this inshore area, there were initial concerns that the whale may be disorientated or injured. However, the whale seemed to be behaving normally and appeared to be feeding. This sighting came just days after another report of a humpback further north at the mouth of Gair Loch, Wester Ross. The whales were most likely feeding on herring as autumn is the time of year when the majority of herring around Scotland are moving inshore to spawn. Two humpback sightings in the same week may be an indication of returning herring stocks on the west coast. Despite more recent bad weather, we did get a report from a local fishing boat in late November of a minke whale off Mull. The whale was seen swimming amongst huge shoals of fish, most likely herring or possibly sprat, which were showing on the echo sounder of the vessel.

The previous week, the same fishing boat reported a small group of bottlenose dolphins playing around their bows. Bottlenose dolphins sightings have continued to be reported to HWDT right up to the end of November. The most recent of these sightings was a pair of dolphins seen playing near a local fish farm in the Sound of Mull, whilst Sea Watch received further reports of bottlenose dolphins in the Sound of Sleat..

Other sightings from the region include a minke whale seen between Arisaig and Eigg in late October, two common dolphins at Largs marina in mid November and another humpback whale in the Sound of Rona, Isle of Skye at the end of November. During October and November, harbour porpoises were seen regularly in Dumfries and Galloway and Ayrshire, particularly off Arran, Mull of Galloway and Balcary Point (Mull).



Photo of the humpback whale in Loch Long by Scott Hussey.

North East England

From Andy Tait, regional coordinator for North East England (Northumberland, Tyne and Wear and Durham)

October sightings started with a minke whale seen feeding only 500m offshore in King Edwards Bay, Tynemouth, followed shortly after by two white-beaked dolphins travelling south a little closer inshore on the 1st November. The next sighting was of two harbour porpoise feeding only 100 m offshore at Lizard Point in a very heavy sea on the 5th. On the 7th November, there was a report of a small group of unidentified dolphins going south past Cresswell. Two harbour porpoises were seen feeding 50 m offshore at Lizard Point in a heavy sea on the morning of the 12th. The next day saw two harbour porpoise feeding 150 m off Lizard Point in a slightly quieter sea. Five white-beaked dolphins were spotted on the afternoon of the 21st travelling fast in a southwards direction off Lizard Point, yet again in a heavy sea. On the 23rd, two harbour porpoises were seen foraging 200 m off Marsden Rock in the heavy swell that prevailed for most of the month.

Sightings for November started late with the first on the 20th, of two adult and one juvenile harbour porpoise travelling north close inshore past Lizard Point on a windy morning. On the 21st, two harbour porpoises were seen foraging 200

m off Marsden rock, and two were also seen on the morning of the 22nd 200 m north-east of Lizard Point. At lunchtime on the 23rd, a single harbour porpoise was seen foraging 100 m offshore near Lizard Point. Three harbour porpoises were foraging 150 m off Lizard Point on the morning of the 24th, and the final sightings of the month were of two separate sightings of two harbour porpoise. Finally, we also received a rather sketchy report that two “sub adult male orcas” were seen a mile off Hartlepool sometime in November.

Eastern England

No sightings were reported from Yorkshire, Humberside, Lincolnshire or Norfolk - if you have any sightings please let us know!

In Suffolk, however, Dunwich Heath Sea Watch continued their watches and after several hours of watching they were rewarded with a few sightings of harbour porpoise in both months, seen singly or in pairs, 0.5 – 1 km offshore. Further south, in Essex, there were some good regular sightings of individual or pairs of harbour porpoise mainly around the Baffle Wall in the River Blackwater but also from the Colne Estuary in October. However, only few sightings were reported in November.

Eastern England: Thames Estuary

From Renata Kowalik, Thames Marine Mammals Sightings Survey, Marine & Freshwater Conservation Programme, Zoological Society of London (ZSL)

Over October two sightings were sent in of a harbour porpoise seen near Cliffe Fort and Sea Reach, and three seal sightings near the Greenwich and Limeharbour area. During November only two sightings were sent in of a seal hanging around near Blackwall Yard and Greenwich Peninsula.

Southern England

The region from Kent to Hampshire was very quiet in the autumn; with only one sighting of bottlenose dolphins reported from the Isle of Wight close to Ryde pier in late October.

South West England

In the South West, plenty of sightings were reported during October and November, including regular sightings of harbour porpoise, and several sightings of common dolphins and bottlenose dolphins. In Dorset, bottlenose dolphins were seen off Boscombe and Old Harry rocks in October.

South West England: Devon

From Gavin Black

There were 41 separate sightings of cetaceans, seals and basking sharks in October and November. Not a bad stat considering the pretty foul weather we've been having. Even with such poor weather, hardened volunteers managed to gather 23 hours worth of effort-related survey data in October and November this year.

We received 28 sightings of harbour porpoise between October and November and all apart from nine were off the North Devon coast again. On the south coast, there have been at least 8 sightings of groups of up to five porpoises since the beginning of October from Berry Head. Hopefully this marks the beginning of the winter sightings when, like last year, they appeared almost every day. The only other sighting on the south coast was made off Dawlish on the 12th November by a birder who was waiting for a long-billed murrelet to appear! In North Devon, porpoises were seen all along the coast on a regular basis from Hartland to Ilfracombe with a number of sightings from Lundy Island.

Many of these sightings came from dedicated watches by volunteers in North Devon, and this has enabled some preliminary very basic estimates of relative abundance to be calculated. Please take these with a pinch of salt as we've yet to do some robust statistical analysis on the data but with this in mind, here are the top three “hotspots” for porpoises based on these data. In the top spot stands Hartland Point where an average of three porpoises were seen per hour. In second place is Morte Point with 2.6 porpoises seen per hour, and third is Baggy Point with 1.5 porpoises seen per hour. Please bear in mind that the more data gathered the more accurate these relative abundances will be. Close behind these were Capstone and Bull Point. Other headlands in North Devon also seem to be good hotspots but more hours need to be spent watching to collect more data so an average number of animals per hour can be calculated.

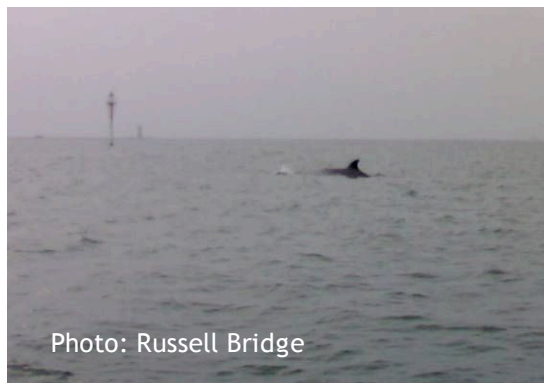


Photo: Russell Bridge

A BIG “thank you” to all volunteers who have carried out watches. Please keep going as we’re getting fantastic information. And whilst many have not yet seen anything despite hours of watching... please remember that no sightings are just as useful as having many... although maybe not as exciting!

We have had no confirmed sightings of bottlenose dolphins over these months, although there were a couple of possible sightings. A group of four dolphins were spotted off Teignmouth on 12th October, and another group was sighted off Jenny’s Cove, Lundy on 15th October.

There were four confirmed sightings of common dolphins round Devon, with three occurring on the 11th and 12th October of up to 20 dolphins around Lundy. A small group of five were spotted off Berry Head on 1st November just 15 minutes before a similarly sized group of porpoise closer inshore. Possible sightings of common dolphins include a group of five off Lundy on 27th October, and a single animal off Saunton Downend on 15th November.

A large unidentified cetacean was spotted on 14th October in Plymouth Sound... see photograph. This generated much interest and suggestions of its identity ranged from Risso’s dolphin and orca to pilot or minke whale. Unfortunately even with this photo, we had to record it as an unidentified large cetacean. Another unidentified large whale was spotted very briefly off Berry Head on 15th November.

Other sightings comprised grey seals and basking sharks! Unusually, we received a couple of sightings of basking sharks off the south coast right into November. This may be due to late-blooming non-native plankton species which encourages them to feed at the surface rather than deeper in the water column as they would usually do at this time of year.

Although winter is nigh and weather conditions are not likely to be conducive to cetacean watching, I’d like to encourage people to get out on those calm, cold and clear days and keep an eye out. Who knows what you might see...

South West England: Cornwall

From Dan Jarvis, Cornwall Wildlife Trust (sightings information reproduced with permission of Cornwall Wildlife Trust www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/).

October and November have been very good months for spotting cetaceans and other marine animals around Cornwall, with a great diversity of species observed and some of them in large numbers, making for an exciting time to take a trip out to the coast – when the weather eventually improves!

The local bottlenose dolphin pod has apparently been quite active during the last couple of months, with frequent sightings throughout October and November in the St Ives Bay area as well as short intervals spent at places such as Penzance, Falmouth, Mevagissey and Chapel Porth.

Harbour porpoises have covered a significant part of the Cornish coastline, ranging from St Austell, Rosemullion Head, Lizard Point and Mount’s Bay on the south coast; Porthcurno, Gwennap, Sennen and the Brisons around the Land’s End peninsula; and St Ives and Port Isaac on the north coast. There have also been sightings into the Isles of Scilly. Most pods have been small, but a couple of sightings involved larger groups of around 10 individuals.

Risso’s dolphins made one recorded appearance during this period when two animals were seen off the Isles of Scilly. Around the same time as this sighting (late September – mid-October), big pods of around 100-200 common dolphins were also seen in and around the remote archipelago. Interestingly, similar numbers were seen off the Cornish mainland at the same time in 2005, possibly indicating that this period is when the species begins to congregate in the Western Approaches and form the ‘superpods’ of over 1000 dolphins that have been seen in December and January in previous years. Elsewhere, however, smaller groups of common dolphins have been seen at Gwennap, Mount’s Bay, Sennen and the Brisons. The latter of these sightings was of a pod of approximating 70 members, feeding in conjunction with gannets and a single minke whale on 29th October.

The final species to have been identified over the last couple of months was a lone pilot whale. It was seen off Talland, Looe, on 5th November; and presumably the same one was seen on the same date at Rosemullion Head on the eastern side of the Lizard Peninsula, followed by a further sighting off nearby Falmouth on 11th November.

Unidentified dolphins were seen off the Lizard, Polperro near Looe and St Austell, while a ‘large’ cetacean was spotted in Barn Pool (inshore of Plymouth Breakwater) in the mouth of the River Tamar on 14th October.

The last basking sharks of the year appear to have gone now. The last sighting in Cornwall occurred on 16th October off Lizard Point. Sunfish have also disappeared until next year, but individuals were seen at St Ives, Mother Ivey’s Bay near Padstow and Botallack near Pendeen. These have now been replaced with more unusual visitors: by-the-wind

sailors. These harmless small, blue jellyfish-like creatures have been washing ashore in massive numbers around the South-West during November, and have continued to be found on the beaches during December. To conclude this article's sightings roundup, two turtles of the hard-shell variety (likely loggerheads) have been spotted off North Cornwall. Divers off St Agnes observed the first, whilst National Coastwatch Institute staff saw the second from their lookout at St Ives. The local British Divers Marine Life Rescue group was informed and put on standby in case these displaced tropical animals were found on the beaches. However, at time of writing, nothing has been heard.

Other News

Now that we are into the winter months, marine life has been washing ashore dead in greater numbers, keeping Cornwall Wildlife Trust Marine Stranding Network (www.cwtstrandings.org) volunteers busy on the beaches. As well as a few dolphin carcasses, a minke whale came ashore at Porthcothan, near Newquay, on November 25th. Samples were taken from it before it washed back out to sea on the following high tide. Several seals have also been examined - mostly pups now that it is the grey seal breeding season. On that note, 14 live pups have been rescued by British Divers Marine Life Rescue (www.bdmlr.org) medics and taken for rehabilitation, together with assistance with another two incidents. The end of both October and November were very busy times and the trend continued into December as the sometimes atrocious weather conditions brought yet more seals up on to the beaches. In fact it has now become so busy for the local BDMLR group here in Cornwall that two new Assistant Coordinators have been appointed to help manage the county. Jenny Haley will be covering the Newquay area, while Hannah Walter will cover in and around Bude. Both have already been a great asset on several rescues, already providing vital leading roles at various incidents over the last couple of months.

Cornwall Seal Group (www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk) held their 18th bimonthly meeting on 25th October 2006. Members have already identified 169 different individual seals in one colony so far this year. At the meeting, Caroline Curtis (CWTMSN member) described a call out she had to a dead seal in Porthleven harbour. She found it had a brown flipper tag, number 50009. After enquiring, she was able to identify this seal as Canvey, rescued by the Seal Sanctuary in 1996 and released in 1997. This is their longest known seal release survivor – at 10 years old. As soon as Sue Sayer (CSG founder) saw photos of Canvey, she was able to identify him as male seal DP12 from the photo ID database. DP12 has an unusual visit pattern, having been seen only once per year since 2000. He was last seen on the north Cornish coast on 21st Feb 2006. This is the first time that the three marine organisations of the National Seal Sanctuary, Cornwall Seal Group and Cornwall Marine Strandings Network have successfully linked up to tell the story of one seal. The 11th November saw popular seal 'Chairlift' make his 100th appearance since 10th June 2000, at one north coast haulout. This is the first seal to have an identification centenary!

Events

No public or fundraising events have been held over the last couple of months, but both the CWT Marine Strandings Network and BDMLR have held important meetings for its members. On 25th November, the MSN held their third annual forum to update the dedicated team of volunteers on the latest trends in the data they were collecting and practice techniques, with talks by leading members of the Network and also by Dr Paul Jepson of the Institute of Zoology. On the same day, BDMLR held their annual Coordinators Meeting in London in which several important topics were discussed and improved protocols for cetacean strandings were presented. The recent changes in coverage of the country to provide better management along sections of the coast were also highlighted, as well as a plethora of new equipment including rescue trailers and a specialist whale disentanglement kit.

Emergency numbers:

For live seals, call the **National Seal Sanctuary** on 01326 221361.

People are warned not to approach or handle any pups that they may find on the beach, as this can cause the mother to reject it, as well as the danger of being bitten and the risk of infection.

For dead cetaceans, seals etc, call the **Cornwall Wildlife Trust** hotline on 0845 2012626.

People are advised not to touch carcasses due to the risk of infection. CWT is the official recorder of dead marine wildlife in Cornwall.

For live marine animals in distress, call **British Divers Marine Life Rescue** on 01825 765546.

People are advised not to immediately return stranded cetaceans to the water, but to keep the animal upright and wet, avoiding getting water in the blowhole, until a thorough health check can be made by trained medics and veterinarians.

Wales

From Hanna Nuuttila, Sea Watch Foundation Sightings Officer

In Cardigan Bay and particularly around New Quay, the bottlenose dolphins were seen almost daily throughout October, typically feeding off New Quay Head or travelling across the Bay. Elsewhere, bottlenose dolphins were sighted off Aberporth and from around Anglesey, off Great Orme's Head and Llandudno Bay in North Wales. No harbour porpoises were sighted in New Quay in October but a few sightings came in from Aberporth and off Anglesey. A few

Sea Watch surveys were still conducted in October although less and less dolphins were spotted, with sightings being mainly of harbour porpoise and grey seals.

Sightings decreased in November but the dolphins were still to be seen in and around New Quay Bay. More harbour porpoise were seen, as expected with the absence of dolphins, mostly feeding off Dolau beach.

Many thanks to those few volunteers still around in the autumn. Hope to see you again next year!

North West England

From Dave McGrath, Sustainability Education Officer at Solaris Centre, Blackpool

The weather this autumn has not been good for cetacean watching. However, there have been a few sightings when calm conditions have prevailed. All the sightings are from Starr Gate at the southern end of Blackpool Promenade, which reflects the observer coverage rather than actual distributions. During October and November, the only species seen was harbour porpoise, which is to be expected. A pod of at least three porpoises was seen off Starr Gate on 20th October, followed by singles there on 6th and 28th November. Just outside our area, south of the Ribble, a harbour porpoise was recorded close inshore off Formby Point, Merseyside on 8th November.

Isle of Man

From John Galpin, regional coordinator for the Isle of Man, and Manx Whale & Dolphin Watch

Every year the herring leave their summer feeding grounds in the waters to the west of the Island and go to spawn off the east coast of Mann. The minke whales, which have spent the summer feeding close offshore on these and other shoaling fish, now follow the herring eastwards, and so begins the regular minke whale sightings close to our eastern shore-line.

The herring spawn in small patches on the seabed, each patch being in the order of 100 square metres, and these clumps of eggs can be found anywhere from near the shore-line to about 12 miles out. Spawning first occurs off the southwest of the island, from around Port Soderick and further east. In some years, large numbers of cetaceans have been seen in Port Soderick Bay, amongst a sea white and foaming with the detritus of millions of spawning fish. Spawning continues and moves further north along the coast, finishing in late November or early December in that stretch of water between Clay Head and the Bahama sandbank.

Late September and early October sightings of minke whales along the east coast followed the expected pattern, and minke were seen all along the eastern seaboard of the island, usually less than 300 metres from shore, feeding on the spawning and spent herring. However, a severe change in the weather on the 10th of October, coinciding with a BBC film crew wanting to film them, ensured that the minke became elusive, not re-appearing until the 28th of October when a prolonged period of sightings began.

October ended with 8-9 minke sightings, all from or around Laxey Bay. Typically, the whales were seen from about lunch time and remained close to shore and easily visible for several hours, generally until dusk prevented further observation.

Two of the sightings were unusual. Willoughby Whittle was the first to identify that there were probably at least two minke being seen, and the sighting by Rob Greaves and his wife was of a close encounter with a minke breaching fully clear of the water, not 50 metres from their boat. The only other October sightings were a pair of breaching and acrobatic Risso's dolphins on the 20th, 400 metres off Dalby Point on the west coast; three unidentified dolphins off Maughold Head on the 24th, and a single harbour porpoise, again off Maughold Head on the east coast on the 29th.

November started wonderfully, just as October had ended: lots of minke sightings in and around Laxey and Bulgham Bays. John Cowin provided the majority of sightings for the month, mostly of minke whales but also a number of harbour porpoises. From the 1st to the 14th, there were a further 18 sightings of minke in that one small area of coast and all close to shore. Local Douglas photographer Ben Hill captured some excellent minke photos, as reproduced on the right.

There were at least two and possibly three minke regularly sighted throughout November; one was distinguished by having a pale/white patch, estimated at about 500 mm diameter, behind its dorsal fin and over part of its tail stock.



Photos taken on 9th November, 300m off shore in Laxey Bay, Isle of Man by Ben Hill.

After the 14th November, the weather worsened, sightings stopped, and nothing further was reported for the rest of the month.

Many thanks to everyone who reported their sightings of these spectacular marine mammals. For a full list of sightings, dates, times, species and observers, please visit the 'Manx Whale + Dolphin Watch' website at www.mwdw.net or the Sea Watch website.

Channel Islands

No sightings were reported in the Channel Islands during this period – if you have any sightings please let us know!

Northern Ireland & Republic of Ireland

Compiled by Hanna Nuuttila (All records are validated and available on www.iwdg.ie)

During October, sightings were still plentiful, with harbour porpoise seen across the island, and minke whales sighted regularly off Sleah Head in Kerry, and Ardmore Head in Waterford. Common dolphins were reported from Counties Kerry, Clare and Cork. A few bottlenose dolphin sightings came in from Roches Point and Ballycotton in Cork, Tory Island in Donegal, Smerwick Harbour in Kerry, Galley Head in Cork, Mullaghmore in Sligo, and Rathlin Island in Antrim. A single humpback whale was sighted a few times in early October off Loop Head, Clare and Sleah Head, Kerry, and Risso's dolphins were reported further in the St. George Channel. A few fin whales were sighted off Rosscarbery Bay, Galley Head in Cork, and in the Celtic Sea, off Waterford and off High Island, Glandore, in Co. Cork.

In November, fin whales were seen regularly, mainly off Cork but also off Sleah Head in Kerry and Ardmore Head in Waterford. Cork was the busiest county for other species as well, with common dolphins sighted off Castletownbere, Clonakilty Bay, Rosscarbery Bay and Courtnacsherry Bay, and bottlenose dolphins spotted off Roches Point. Single minke whales were seen a few times off Rosscarbery Bay and Baltimore in Cork, and off Sleah Head and Valentia Island in Kerry. Several harbour porpoise were sighted, mainly in the first part of the month near Portmuck, Island Magee in Antrim, off Clew Bay in Mayo, Howth Head, Dublin, Newcastle in Down and Sleah Head in Kerry. Finally, a humpback whale was seen off Ardmore Head, Waterford, in early November.

Sea Watch Foundation's project "Encouraging Public Participation in Cetacean Monitoring" is supported BG International, Dong Eftersforskning og Produktion and Atlantic Petroleum, and the Countryside Council for Wales.

Further details on all our activities can be found on the Sea Watch Foundation website (www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk), by e-mailing <info@seawatchfoundation.org.uk> or by calling Sea Watch on 01545 561227.